POSITION OF ARCHITECTS IN IRELAND.

I am glad to find that my crude and desultory thoughts on this matter have created some interest among the profession. Your correspondent, "J. J. L.," has conceded to the truth of my most material statements, and has courteously taken exception to one or two: he does not approve my censuring the Institute, kindly throws the veil of charity over their failings, and accounts for their non-success by the difficulties they had to encounter. I do not believe, nor can I perceive, that they have had more difficulties to encounter than any other fine art association in the kingdom; the institutions cited by "J. J. L." have had much greater obstacles in their path, yet they have been nobly overcome, and deeply is Ireland indebted to their indefatigable promoters.

The truth is, the grand obstacle they had to encounter was that unjust and impolitic monopoly of architectural practice which Government instituted in the country, and against which the Institute never raised its voice; and why? because the leading members of it were and are interested in the maintenance of that monopoly. What would the profession in England say were Government to place the designing of every church in the hands of one architect; of every workhouse in those of another; and of every normal school and educational establishment in those of a third? Why, such a storm of indignation would burst from one end of your land to the other as would scare any Government from the commission of so unjust an act. Yet this is the hard grievance under which we have been labouring, and which has blighted the prospects and cramped the energies of many rising and clever young architects; which has driven scores of them from their native land to find in America and elsewhere that opening for their talents which an unwise Government has denied them at home.

I say an unwise Government, for the system under which these Government works are carried on is foolish and impolitic in the extreme, discreditable to those who are connected with them, and injurious to the community at large. I will take, for example, the Poor Law Commission. There are about 140 unions and workhouses in Ireland; they are all the works of the Commissioners' architect, or rather, be originally designed one, and all the rest are a stereotyped edition of that one; the same style, the same plan, the same arrangement, repeated in every one, no matter what the site, what the peculiarities of locality. To any architect who has sat down to study and prepare plans for an English workhouse, who knows the intense thought, care, and anxious consideration given to every arrangement and detail of the building, it will appear incredible that such an amount of labour and responsibility should be thrown on one individual.

The consequence is, and it is a notorious fact, that the Irish workhouses are in every respect most defective, ill-arranged, ill-sewered, ill-ventilated; thousands of pounds have been expended in remedying defects of arrangement and construction; and the loss of life consequent upon the neglect of due sanitarial precautions has been constantly and strenuously commented on by the medical officers of these establishments.

And is this state of things to continue,—are public health and public money to be squandered by the hasty and inconsiderate planning and erection of these edifices? Twelve of hot-house growth have already sprung from the offices of the Custom-house within the last six months; it is calculated that forty-eight more are required in a short space of time. Surely the Government do not mean to perpetrate any longer this system of things. If they wish to have economically constructed buildings,—if they wish to have those houses where the poor are lodged and fed, well arranged, well ventilated, well sewered, and made fit for the reception of rational beings,—if they desire to raise and elevate the character of the profession in this country, let them throw open these public sources of architectural practice and profit to the community at large, and when by such encouragement the numbers and means of the profession increase, and its character becomes elevated, then indeed, Ireland may hope to have a disinterested, high-minded, and art-loving Architectural Institute.

Much of what I have stated holds good respecting the Educational Board: in fact, I saw, a short time since, an entire edition of model agricultural schools, lithographed from one design, and which one design I expect will be repeated as often as the two hundred copies of the union workhouse. Now, if the professional public had been consulted in reference to these model schools, what varieties of design, what new points of arrangements, and what excellent and economical modes of construction, might have been arrived at by their varied investigations! But the board has rejected all these advantages, and, acting on the penny-wise and pound-foolish system, are repeating, *ad nauseam*, the one plan in every site and under all circumstances. I have already adverted to the evils produced by the "Ecclesiastical Commission," whose system of church-building has become distasteful alike to the clergy and people.

It is with pleasure I turn from the doings of these bodies to the contrast exhibited by the Board of Works. They have acted on a truly liberal and art-encouraging principle. The opportunities under their patronage are few; yet they have been given abroad to the profession. In many instances their patronage has been judiciously bestowed, as in the case of the Cork Lunatic Asylum, designed by Mr. Atkins, a southern architect, the representative of his class, the young and ardent members of the profession, to whom this selection has given encouragement and hope.

To advocate their claims has been the object of my humble pen: to call the attention of those in power to the evils their system is inflicting on our profession, and to agitate a removal of those impediments which block the progress of Irish architecture, has been my earnest desire.

Your correspondent, "J. J. L.," in denying my assertion of the low state of architectural practice amongst us, states that, "in the principal cities of Ireland are to be found some buildings which may be considered gems of art." I am sorry that he did not name these cities, and point the buildings out to our notice which are "gems of art." I have been in all the principal cities, and have never been able to discover them: in Belfast and Cork are one or two edifices which barely rise above mediocrity; but as to being "gems of art," the least said about them the better. And as to Dublin, which he has cited in contradicting my assertion, I fully concede to the justice of his eulogium on the public buildings; but let it be remembered, that they are evidences of departed greatness, emanations of the genius of other times, of a Gandon, of a Johnstone, and a Morrison; let it be remembered, that the mind which conceived the Custom-house, the Bank of Ireland, the law courts, and the King's Inns—the proudest monuments of our metropolis—was formed, and educated, and perfected in England; let it be remembered, that the King's-bridge terminus, the finest building erected in Dublin in our own times, as also the stations of the Southern and Western Railway, were designed by Sancton Wood, an English architect.

Let any individual drop into the Art Exhibition in Abbey-street, now open, and he will see the sorry figure which Irish architecture makes there: so melancholy an exposure of the beggary of that branch of our national art should not have been permitted. Falseness of taste, incongruity of design, a total absence of all thought and originality, characterise this year's exhibition; the execution of the drawings generally is of the worst description, some of them such as a school-boy would be ashamed of.

THE CELT.

A FEW WORDS ON PROGRESS IN ARCHITECTURE.

THERE are in all things certain great natural facts, which become essential constituent sources, and these originate style and habit, from which we cannot deviate much; and where a number of forms have, during centuries, been used in all their various modifications, their characteristics are facts, and they cannot again be sufficiently varied to produce a *great distinct* and *positive* expression.

It is so to a great extent in sculpture and architecture, and he who selects and delineates the most beautiful forms by intense mental and physical labour may as well be called a mere copyist as he who, taking the soul and principle of Gothic architecture, using its best graces and uniting its clear and well-defined proportions, its properly adapted capabilities, and its examples of the just and economical use of materials in the structure he is about to raise may be so termed.

They both have found forms which, eliciting their admiration and ensuring their devotion, have, by the excitement produced in the mind, given the reflection of these objects, according to their powers, just as simply and naturally as the human face divine is reflected by the capabilities of the physical mirror when presented before it. Thus did the mediæval architects and masons give their impressions of the forms preceding them, with those tones of thought and feeling, mellowing and enriching, softening or emboldening, its various parts and details. We also may, and *only* can do this, and the reason why we do not, while possessing such exquisite monuments before our eyes, with all their geometric and artistic excellence and perfection, produce those results we should and *do* so ardently desire, is, because the reflecting medium is dimmed by the damping and withering influence of physical, moral, and pecuniary causes, apart and distinct from mental power; for as the human form is the same as in by-gone ages, so is the mind, if only the surrounding circumstances are sufficient to call forth the latent power.

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The day shall surely come, when the simple selections of obvious additions, occasional expedients, accidental jumblings, real errors, quaint usages, and weak-minded devices, with all those childish symbols, which now education and expanded powers of mind have taught us to improve or discard, will be banished away; and we shall behold the presence of pure form, perfection of colour, with realization of decided and unquestionable usages, which the simple yet sublime religion of Jesus Christ requires: that religion which says to its followers, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another."

If we behold the massive pyramid, the gigantic dome, or columnar temple, we find but one feeling pervade the whole; there is a defined, a limited awe, and the effect is too much material. But only leave these contemplations, and pass the portals of the mediæval times, when the whole soul is raised by lightness and expanse to the blue vault of heaven itself, and then say, can the dull pyramid, the dark temples of Egypt,—the Roman Forum, with the chaste structure of the Greek, hold state or tide with these erections?

Men live now who can construct the groin, calculate the weight or thrust of roofs, raise on slender columns the vaulted aisle, carry up the spire tapering towards heaven. If not so, whence the electric light,—the iron tube for the railway road, lifted in mid-air, or tunnel sunk below the mortal ken,—the lightning's conversation, or the mighty powers of steam, controlled and held like child in arms, till made to do its bidding, with all the thousand aims and ends of science and industry?

Give but the physical means, and let the motive be directed, then shall religion's home as surely rise in grace and beauty, resplendently adorned, as that the quarry teems with stone, the earth with clay, the forest groans with timber, or the encrusted bowels of the earth contain its mines.

A. Z.

YORKSHIRE ARCHITECTURAL SOCIETY.—On 18th ult. the quarterly committee meeting of this society was held at the society's rooms, Minster-yard, York. It was resolved to invite the Lincolnshire Architectural Society to meet them in this county, to form a joint excursion to some objects of architectural interest. It was resolved also to unite with the Northamptonshire and other architectural societies in the publication of reports, papers, &c.

DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY AT GRAVESEND.—A fearful conflagration took place here on the 11th, by which 80,000*l.* worth of property was destroyed. Half the High-street has been swept away. Unluckily we learn nothing from experience: houses will again be put up, with the best possible arrangements for—burning.

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